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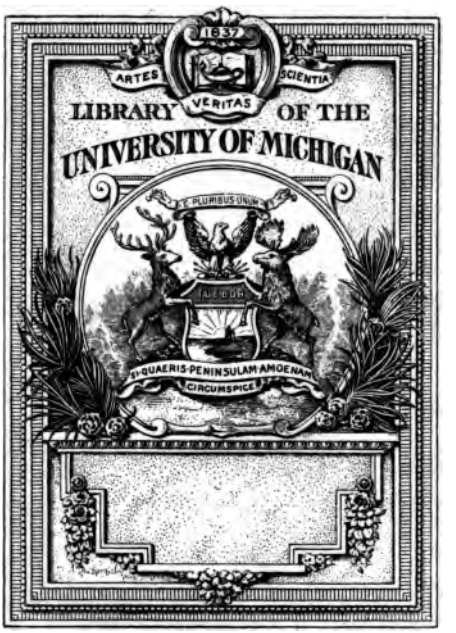
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TWO LECTURES

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ON

CLASSICAL LITERATURE.

BEING

PART OF A COURSE DELIVERED

AT THE

NEW-YORK ATHENÆUM

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LECTURE I.

ON THE GENERAL SPIRIT AND TENDENCY OF CLASSICAL LITERATURE.

LECTURE II.

ON THE INFLUENCE OF THE REVIVAL OF CLASSICAL LITERATURE UPON LETTERS AND THE ARTS.

LECTURE I.

I PROPOSE to consider in this lecture the general spirit and tendency of Classical Literature.

I approach with reverence so great a subject; I feel all the difficulty of treating with originality that which has employed the pens of some of the first of men; and like one who wanders spell-bound amid the ruins of a mighty empire, I find the inadequacy of words to express the beauty, the sublimity, the imagination, which reign in these relics spared by time. Yet, if a love, ardent and sincere, for classical studies; if a mind, I hope I may say without vanity, in some degree imbued from its earliest thoughts with recollections cherished and called up by a thousand associations of ancient annals; if many hours, I dare not say

wasted in the contemplation of these models of European—of our own literature, can give a claim to your attention, I ask it. Classical themes, classical associations, form alone the inspiration to which I must look for eloquence—yet even in the names themselves there is eloquence. The very words alone, Greece and Rome, raise in us emotions,—they bring to our minds those talismanic terms, which are literally burning words, for Leonidas, Marathon, Platæa, and a host of others, seem but personifications of liberty,—and no matter in what clime the oppressor's yoke was to be trampled under foot—no matter whether an old or new world was to be regenerated, they came mingled and identified with the thoughts of freedom, the universal patrimony of every free nation. And often, as I have sat surrounded by their works, while the godlike page of Plato was open before me, or Cicero, unequalled name in Roman history, was charming with immortal eloquence, to my roused fancy the bars of the tomb have been broken, and the men themselves have come to inspire nobler aspirations of liberty and virtue; and I have been

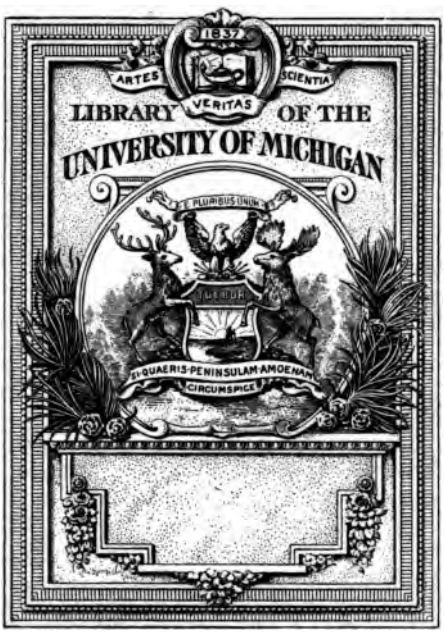
ready to exclaim in the words of Alcæus, "You are not dead, but live in those Islands of the Blest, where Achilles and Diomedes have gone before you."

By Classical Literature I understand those remains of the Greek and Roman letters which have reached us. It therefore admits of a distinction into these two classes. In the remarks which follow, though generally applicable to both, reference is had more to the Grecian than the Roman, as the former is more spirited, original, and powerful; the latter rather a continuation, a translation, than a fountain of its own. They are the golden and the silver ages of letters; where, in the latter the mind having reached its greatest perfection rather degenerates from its original vigour. In the Grecian, in all the highest efforts of human genius are found a simplicity, a truth to nature, which touch while they astonish; in the Roman is more of refinement, more of ornament, less of free and bold imaginations. The Romans contented themselves with being the worthy pupils of great masters,—they opened not new paths, they aspired not to lead, but followed, giving a

grace and finish to what was already created. Thus, in the most delightful Roman poetry we are ever reminded of the Grecian,—its finest flights betray the eagle-wing of its predecessors, and its greatest invention is a new combination of their thoughts. But the Grecian poetry is inspiration itself, it comes directly from nature, it is, like the inhabitants of Attica, αυτοχθων. Its fancies belong to the very soil—there they sprung, there they seem most natural; there is the birth-place of its mythology, and in its scenery, its language, and its fictions, its guardian deities take their greatest delight.

In Classical Literature we meet with an exuberance of fancy. The earth was then unappropriated; and its flowers, fields, the beasts of the forest, the works of men, all gave a free range for illustration, without the danger of being anticipated by an earlier footstep. The minds of men could roam unchecked through the world's vast expanse, and whatever was more striking, more beautiful, or sweeter, they could cull to enrich their stores. Their scenery, naturally picturesque, was heightened by asso-

ciations which made it more lovely—their fanciful eye could discern new beings to pay homage to—and the sublime opinion of Thales was almost realized, that the Divinity was the soul that filled and breathed life into the universe. An ethereal power was seen to animate every grove; beautiful beings were bid to preside over every gushing stream, while thoughts more of heaven than earth, were whispered to every one, if not by his own genius as he too credulously imagined, yet by the universal genius of nature. Thus while the Grecian was wandering among the temples which hallowed to religion the loveliest spots of earth, or yielding homage to the marble images which stood like deities in the gardens and fountains, how could he but feel his fancy teeming with glorious thoughts, as he gazed upon the beautiful before him? Imagination became the presiding faculty of his nature—all the visions of demi-gods and heroes, which it brought to his sight, he felt himself bound to believe—and a sublime presence awaited him in the most solitary scenes. The voice of diviner spirits was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ceeding times, that in the latter they mark the age of ignorance, and fade with the advance of refinement, but in the former they were cherished in the most polished eras. We all can feel how much our own poetry has lost by losing its ideal character, by throwing off the sanctity of tradition, and confining itself to the descriptions of reality. The fairies, which once charmed, charm no longer—they have receded before the ages of knowledge, and the poet is precluded from preternatural and legendary fictions. Taste has lighted her torch at the altar of truth, and fanciful illusions vanish in her beams. Even Chaucer complains that the fairies had been in his time banished by the monks from the British shore,*—and now are daily expiring the remnants of the delightful rustic sports of England, which received so peculiar an interest from popular superstitions. Our soil never has been touched by fairy-step, the beliefs which have marked the infancy of other nations have not reached us; the delusions of fiction belong not to our country; and if we would enjoy them, we must go

* Wife of Bath's Tale.

back to the classic ages when the earth was alive with hosts of beautiful imaginary beings, and when fancy, like the evening-star, daily rose in the twilight, investing the forms of nature with softer radiance. Then the scenery never was dead, but it gathered a new life from the never-failing smiles of imagination. Let it not be said that enlightened men disbelieved these fictions—they were brought so constantly present to every mind as to produce the effect of belief. Their history was interwoven with them, their temples recorded them, and as they looked upon the pictured or sculptured representations, the models of consummate art, which every where at home and abroad surrounded them—the false-witnesses which gave delusion the colour of reality—fancy overthrew the cold dominion of reason, and for a while they believed them to be true. Hence that imaginative spirit which is breathed over the whole of Classical Literature, giving brilliancy to its poetry, and shedding on even its philosophy itself the attraction of romance. From the lovely clime of Ionia, where nature has tempered with her kindest skill the vicissitudes of

the seasons, seem to have sprung that exquisite delicacy and purity of taste which reign in every class of their productions. There first was cut the Ionic capital, the grace and pride of architecture, and there the Homeric swan first plumed his wings. Thence was diffused that "Ionian elegance," the proverb for every thing chaste or delightful in fancy or taste. Whatever nature produced of fascinating in objects of sight or sound found there admirers and praisers. The wild harmony of forests was listened to—the beautiful and fragile flowers viewed with rapture, from the same taste which clothed with imagery their poesy. With flowers they strewed the graves of their friends,—with flowers they crowned, a most grateful offering, the altars of their gods—"thy altars," says Callimachus in his hymn to Apollo, "bear in spring the flowers which the dew-breathing Zephyrs blow on, and in winter the sweet crocus,"—with these they garlanded their hair, and loved to feign a renewed and fanciful existence in the form of flowers for the care-worn victims of early fate. It is thus that their poetry receives a fresh perfume from its continual allusions to

this most delicate offspring of nature. But they dared, with bolder images, to unite with heaven the triumphs of human genius. The poet, they said, was the child of Apollo, or of the Muses; they gave him in life a sacred origin, and after death an eternal existence in the figure of a swan. A beautiful thought! His spirit, clothed in its feathered dress, soared proudly to the fountain of its inspiration, or lingered round the scene of its earthly fame, or flew to join the poetic choirs which are spreading together their immortal pinions.

But amid these tones of grace and fancy the ancient lyre is thrilling with a deeper note—a higher power comes to pervade the strings, and the spirit of freedom, which hallows to the lover of republics, to the lover of mankind, Classical Literature, breathes inextinguishably through every part. The consequence of the study is an increased love of free institutions, reflected with united effect from the pages of its historians, orators, and poets. Classical Literature is the history of liberty, its struggles, and its triumphs,—it is the mausoleum, where we see the remains of the

fathers of the world, bearing one great inscription,—devotion to their country. Our memory delights to dwell on the bright annals of tyrant-hating Athens, of republican Rome, the thought of which in after-ages has filled the indignant slave with redeeming energy, and made him feel that he was born equal to his fellows. No common hand has recorded those glories, no feeble intellect is kindling that enthusiasm, but immortal mind, which could not be quenched by ages of darkness, has inscribed them, and the living fire of freedom has communicated a corresponding glow to the literature which celebrates it. Athens, associated with the highest powers of intellect, becomes doubly dear to us as the practical instance how far a free people must be lifted above a servile, and exhibits the genius of republics crowned with the emblems of prosperity and happiness. It is delightful to see one general spirit animating a whole country. The various dialects of Greece,—Ionian, Dorian, Æolian, Attic, have one universal root, and the nations which spoke them, differing—contending on every other theme, join in the undistin-

guishing hatred of slavery. When the delegates from Peloponnesus assembled to deliberate on the restoration of Hippias, the tyrant, to Athens, Sosicles, a Corinthian, exclaimed, and the Grecian voices around him responded to his, "The heavens shall be below the earth, and the earth raised above the heavens, and men abide in the sea, ere the Lacedæmonians undertake to establish tyrannies in the Grecian cities."*

Sentiments like these break forth from every part of their writings, and it has been well said that as long as the languages remain, and the writings of Greece and Rome are understood, there will be a hope for mankind. In them will liberty seek her last retreat, and there shall the young scholar, warming his thoughts with ancient recollections, preserve unexpired a vestal flame of republican virtue. There as he dwells on the generous devotion to country, on the destruction of homes and temples, and all the noble sacrifices of nations who counted every thing as dust in comparison with independence—he will start as if the ancient patriots were around him, and his breast will throb

* Herod. lib. v. c. 92.

with the same love of country which kindled theirs, and conscious that the occasion is alone wanting to equal his fame and virtue to theirs, he will, with an enthusiasm almost pardonable, wish that the danger may arise, that his arm may nerve itself to shield his native land. In modern times too often has the mercenary pen charged upon republican governments scenes of turbulence and anarchy; and, showing the deadly effects of their party-spirit, urged mankind to take shelter in monarchies. But while these writings of antiquity remain, in them shall be the antidote. There is a record which cannot be obliterated; there are praises which will not be forgotten; there live the immortal works of genius associated and assimilated with the triumphs of liberty. And if the American student, as he laments the miserable degeneracy of Greece and Rome when enslaved from the glories of their freedom, chances to glance his eye upon such a passage as this of Herodotus, how he prides himself in the thought that he too is the citizen of a republic: "The Athenians now daily grew in strength; they were freed from their tyrants, and proved,

what all history proves, that freedom is prosperity; for when oppressed, they scarcely coped with their neighbours, but now, when free, they were seized with such a thirst for honourable fame, that they became the first in Greece."* This is the testimony of one who was himself the spectator and recorder of the blessings of Athenian liberty. Herodotus, when he praised the republic of Athens, praised what he had witnessed, he had crowned his brows with the sacred olive of Attica, he had sung at the Olympic festival, while triumphant applauses rebounded from side to side her patriotic devotion, her glorious victories over Persia's myriads. O thou barren and rocky strip of Attica, thy name shall be dear to mankind while there remains in a single heart a free drop of blood; thy name shall ascend in pæans from ten thousand varying tongues; Attica, parent of liberty! Yes, Liberty, thou wert cradled on the Attic mount, and thy infant lips, like Plato's, were sweetened with Hymettian honey.

As, at the Panathenæan game, above the steps of thronging citizens, the music of

* Herod. lib. v. c. 78.

flutes, and the virgin chorus, was heard distinctly to rise the triumphal song, chanting the memory of Harmodius, or the noble daring of Thrasybulus, so from these classic pages, amid all the richness of metaphor and beauty of thought, we can almost audibly catch the exhortation from the spirit of liberty—Be free! To the ancient republicans love of country was a part of their religion, and, ere they forgot that country, they must forget the images of their fathers and the temples of their gods.* Proceeding from this enthusiasm for liberty, and this ardent love of country, were their almost divine speculations concerning those who perished to defend it. Such a death seemed to be a privilege. In the rites of their religion, their names arose mingled with those of the gods; they were handed down in perpetual remembrance from father to son; and Pericles, as he stood over the ashes of those who had fallen in battle, de-

* In illustration of this may be cited these lines of Horace:

Consenuit socerorum in arvis
Sub rege Medo, Marsus et Appulus
Anciliorum et nominis et togæ
Oblitus, æternæque Vestæ,
Incolumi Jove et urbe Roma.

clared, "That the whole earth was their sepulchre, nor were they immortalized only by the inscriptions on their monuments, but even in a foreign land their unwritten memory lived forever."* Extravagant as such expressions seem, they have been verified: climes then unthought of are interested in their fame; and, if in the course of so many ages, their names have been lost, yet their honour lives fresh in their country's memorials, and finds a sympathy in every free breast. They died not for Athens only, but for the world; and the world, grateful for their lessons of patriotism, never hears the name of their birth-place, but it is reminded of its glorious ισονομια. The sounds of patriotism come well from the lips of those whose arms had been raised in its service, and almost all the eminent men in the golden days of Greece had been soldiers for their country. Poets, orators, philosophers, and historians, having braved danger for its sake, had a right to partake in, and to celebrate its glory.†

* Thucydides, lib. ii. c. 43.

† Æschylus, Alcæus, Demosthenes, Socrates, Plato, Thucydides, Xenophon, &c.

There is one trait which proudly distinguishes the better periods of Grecian literature from the Roman and from modern authors, that, seeking for no other patronage than that of a great and enlightened people, it is unmixed with the false praises of patron-monarchs, which make us blush for human genius. The praises thus bestowed, are blots which disfigure the otherwise pure pages of Virgil and Horace. With what weariness and disgust do we turn from those parts of Ariosto, where the payment of the price of patronage extorts from him laboured panegyrics on the scions, past, present, and to come, of the house of Este. In wandering through these obscure lists, the wings of his genius lose their vigour, and sink powerless to the ground. When Tasso, too, stoops to flatter the petty tyrants who could not understand his melancholy temperament, we give him a fresh pity, and execrate the more the unworthy objects he commends. From Boileau's pensioned praise, from Dryden's extravagant and almost alms-begging flattery, from the courtly strains of Waller, from the cumbrous adulation of Bacon, *heu miserande!*

we are humiliated to find the first minds of our race capable of such degradation. But while filled with this mournful view, we are beginning to lower our estimate of mankind; if, then, we come back to the volumes of Grecian lore, we breath a purer air; we return, as Æneas, from Stygian darkness to some bright plain, where the soil is spread with uncontaminated flowers, and we delightfully linger on spirited strains, where the truth is the greatest flattery to a free nation. Pindar himself, while composing odes which celebrate the victories of princes and nobles, passes hastily over their honours, to dwell upon the fables of the gods and heroes, founders of free states, and games where Greeks alone had the privilege of contending. It was these very games which nursed this national and patriotic spirit. They there learnt to be proud of the name of Greek, when at Olympia, a king of Macedonia was excluded from the contest, till he had proved a Grecian descent; his antagonists, when he entered the stadium, objected that the race belonged to Greeks, not to barbarians, but the monarch vindicated his title to the honoured name

by his Argive ancestry.* Yet there the assembled crowd from every corner and region of Greece, when Themistocles, a citizen of Athens, entered the theatre, rose in a body from their seats to salute him.†

Of men who thus knew to value their own country and its most eminent sons, it was the ambition of the greatest genius to merit the applause. He needed not, to incite him, the splendid slavery of a monarch's patronage, but where a free and generous people were assembled round their games,—the games in which talent and skill were their own reward, and the simple crown of olive or laurel weighed down the gemmed diadem,—he brought the productions of his genius. To them he repeated the praises of heroic states, the devotion of patriots, the beneficence of the gods, certain that their Grecian taste, unpurchased and just, would give the meed where it was due; and felt himself more than paid, when the thundering acclamations of thousands and thousands rising upwards carried his name and glory to the skies. And think you not that such a hope

* Herod. lib. v. c. 22. † Plut. in Vit. Themist.

would give bolder inspiration to his fancy, and can you wonder that his powers should be elevated and invigorated when they had in prospect rewards like these? We may well conceive in such a scene, how a delightful yet almost despairing emulation must have drawn tears from the youthful eye, as it did from Thucydides at the Olympic games, when Herodotus recited his Muses. When we see the general assemblies of a nation, owning one kindred name, though divided into numerous distinct peoples, thus made the scenes of literary contest; when we see their taste in poetry and every branch of polished art appealed to by the greatest of mankind as the test of merit, do we not, ought we not to, feel a sentiment of shame at the total absence of such great festivals with us; and must we not acknowledge, that the scholar, whose breast swells with noble enthusiasm at the recollections and memorials of such a people, and with a desire to spread the knowledge and love of them in his own country, has a just cause for his emotions, and deserves well of that country? There, wherever he looks, he sees a people taking a

pride in their monuments of genius; he beholds the greatest of its poets, not only claimed as a citizen by numerous cities as their highest distinction, but actually deified by some; he sees that the ode of another, which celebrated the origin of Rhodes, was inscribed in golden characters in the temple of one of its cities; he sees the power of the lyric melody of Tyrtæus to inspirit the faded courage of the Spartans; and the verses of Euripides so honoured as to save the lives of his captive fellow-citizens from an exasperated foe: how, with these and other numberless instances of honours paid to literature and art, how can he but recur to the remembrance of such a nation, illustrated by such men, endued with such a refined taste, as the model of every thing glorious and inspiring in the history of freedom. Go then to those enchanting pages, dip your throbbing pulse at its fount, in the pure stream of new-born liberty; and let fancy, as it carries you to the clime where every mountain and every river have something to charm, as perhaps it treads with you at the pass of Thermopylæ, or tracks on the Trojan plain in the

twilight the great footstep of Achilles, or winds with the Peneus through the Thessalian Tempe, but wake in you a deeper feeling for lovely nature, for patriotic zeal, here in this congenial land of equal laws: let every sight and every sound, as they bring before your mind spots and themes glorified in classic story, but produce in you a holier ardour for the cause of liberty, an universal love for mankind; and as you roam a delighted visitant to those gardens of flowers and fruits most sweet and valuable, bring back from them the same exquisite sensibility to the beautiful in creation, together with the same taste for all that is noble or excellent in genius and art.

There is something elevating to the mind in the study of the literature of the ancients; there is a sort of just pride in their works, in their national renown, which raises our opinion of mankind. A different race lived then, if we are to judge from the superior grandeur and magnitude of their public edifices, the splendour of their amusements, the perfection to which they brought every art. There is a pleasure in beholding their generous pride in being the citizens of their

states, springing from the consciousness of the advantages they enjoyed. Our minds are filled with το μεγα ονομα Αθηναν,* and we can sympathize in the glory due to the smallest member of such a country. It was a high privilege to call themselves by the then valued name of Greek or Roman, as the possession of it seemed to constitute a distinct class, a higher order of men than the rest of the world. There the arts, whether of peace or war, whether of use or ornament, grew and flourished; there literature spread, softening their manners and refining their taste; and the citizen, looking upon these advantages, learned to value his country, and himself as belonging to it. Around its limits a barrier of gloom appeared to rise, separating it from the land of the barbarian; and glorying in his freedom and his civilization, he considered himself, a simple citizen, entitled to a higher rank than the kings of other countries. Wherever he trod, the greatest specimens of human genius met his view. If entering the splendid temple, where its lengthening colonnade of Parian marble lifted its airy

* Thucyd. lib. vii. c. 64.

capitals, he turned to worship the parent-deity of his race; the perfect statue, almost clothed in immortal glory, seemed to demand his homage. Or if amusement drew his steps to the crowded theatre, to ask his applause the rival geniuses of Sophocles and Euripides produced their master-pieces, confiding to his taste and judgment the discrimination of their numerous beauties. How, then, with all this, with the praises of liberty ringing in his ears, its influence pervading every thing around him, and the images of his country's preservers standing with their crowned honours to greet him—how can we wonder that the ancient republican should think he walked in a brighter path than other mortals, and how can we be surprised at the elevation of soul, which made him esteem his native land far the fairest and first of earth?

Nor is this elevation confined to their politics, but it is communicated likewise to their literature. Hence the fictions, before alluded to, of the celestial origin of the more eminent mind, as if it required a diviner spark to kindle the soul of true genius; and hence that boast we so often meet with

of the immortality of their writings. They feared not the critic's rebuke, but boldly declared, that these the winter shower or the ocean wind had not power to injure. In the works of moderns such a prediction has the air of presumption; but in the ancient, we consider it as a truth which time has realized; as something due to their merit, and only the allowable boast of conscious genius. This immortality they claimed not as a contingency, but a certainty, as if they had had a prophetic spirit that they must survive to obscure the efforts of modern emulation. They knew that they possessed a power of self-preservation, so as amid the accidents of time, and all the neglect of barbarous ages, to keep them safe for us; that they were the remembrancers of a superior race, and must descend to distant ages at once exhibiting what men in former days have acted and thought, and inducing the despair that others ever will in the future arise to equal them.

And here, while considering the tendency of Classical Letters to raise the soul to nobler conceptions, I must not omit the sublime, though often erring, meditations of the

philosophers of old; and, least of all, the mention of the favourite sect of every judging scholar, the sect of Zeno, Seneca, and Epictetus,—the Stoics. Prejudice and misrepresentation have combined to condemn their opinions; but their brightness breaks forth through every cloud, and sheds a loftier light upon ancient philosophy. Even the Christian, rising, as he does, warmed and touched with a purer belief, cannot but look with admiration upon the proud, the almost superhuman conceptions, which gave grandeur to error itself. And indeed if ever the soul can be drawn from self, and fitted for higher objects, it must be when assisted by such speculations as place earth and its ambitions, its passions, and its hopes, below the steady glance of wisdom. The Stoic taught himself to consider man formed not to enjoy the world, but to contemn, and in contemning conquer, every feeling unworthy of a purely intellectual being. And as his thoughts were fixing on these high subjects, did care or sorrow come to distract him, he opposed to its entrance the eternal barrier of an unconquerable soul. And death,—where could death find cause

of dread to him, who looked with equal eye on the decrees of fate; if to live, resolved to live for virtue, if to die, to die without repining. And threats, could they move, or torture terrify him, who forgave not himself, if his flesh shrunk at pain, or his cheek was blanched at danger? But to every thing justly and intrinsically good he looked to guide him; virtue, virtue was his goal, and while the worldling was lost in ambition, his secret aspirations, his open doctrines framed themselves to the pursuit and acquirement of virtue. And deem you an earthly pattern was before him,—no, to the perfections of divinity he raised his mind, and proudly scorned every attribute which savoured not of heaven. By such a life he secured to himself happiness on earth, and he went to the grave confident that it would be rewarded hereafter. Yet he pursued not virtue for its reward, but because it was the only beautiful and good. Thus the Portico became the nurse of the true citizen, the intrepid freeman, whose private feelings merged in the general weal, and who disdained every action which was not based on the justest motives. A devout

sect they cannot be called,—there was too much of haughtiness, of self-confidence in their opinions; but if to hold in contempt the pleasures of the world, and whatever interests mere ordinary men—to crush every selfish and ignoble passion—to be assimilated, as far as man can, with superior beings—are calculated to make us wiser and better, they were pre-eminently so. Demetrius, a celebrated Stoic, used to say, "That he complained of the immortal gods, that they did not beforehand signify to him their will; then, should they doom aught of calamity, should they require his fortune, his children, or his life, he might himself be the first to offer each and all to meet their decrees, and not, as now, content himself merely with following them."* Is there not a sublimity in sentiments like these to transport us to a brighter sphere, the resting-place of some nobler race, where Wisdom sits enthroned, and smiles upon the immortal train around her?

We cannot wonder, then, that this sect should be the glory of the scholar, and fill

* Seneca de Prov. c. 5.

his mind with elevated contemplations. Dr. Warton very justly rebukes Pope for joining in the common-place censure of the Stoics, which ignorance has so often repeated, and cites an admirable defence of their tenets by Mr. Harris.* Montesquieu, Gibbon, Robertson, have recorded their high admiration of them; and though the Portico cannot pretend to the piety, softness, and tempering mercy of Christianity, still it is the perfection of natural religion.

But there is a stronger feeling connected with Classical studies, which enables us at once to account for the deep interest which they have awakened, and to show how beneficially they have acted on mankind. Before us are spread the treasures bequeathed to us by the greatest of our race, which have survived not their authors only, but even their countries and tongues, and which time, sparing nought, has still stayed his hands from injuring. The remnants of a mighty empire lie around us, not of its works of art, but of its works of mind, which contain the examples of the past, and the warning

* Essay on Pope, Vol. ii. p. 82.

voice for us to profit by. When we read the eminent writers of our own language, we are proud of them, and take to ourselves, because we use the same tongue, a portion of their glory: they ask and they receive our sympathy, as our countrymen and brothers. But of these—orphan-children of mighty ancestors—where is the country to sympathize, where is the language to laud, where are the descendants to cherish? Gone,—or worse than gone, so degenerated, that their free ancestors would spurn to acknowledge them. Their kindred has perished, and the very knowledge that such nations ever existed would have perished too, if their memory had not been piously embalmed and honoured in the relics of their literature. How powerful were those nations in their season of prosperity; with what conscious pride did their authors anticipate an increasing honour from their descendants, from being able to claim such a citizenship. But the nations are no more, and there exist none to take an interest in them, none to shield them from calumny; they have no hope but from intrinsic merit.

They are like those insulated beings, who have survived every tie which binds them to the earth. But they have thus become the property of the world, the repositories where are safely stored free principles, true patriotism, and pure taste, to give light to barbarism, and to preserve civilization from retrograding. We therefore look upon them with reverence, as the parents of all that is excellent and happy in our institutions, and with melancholy, that what they record has now its sole existence in their remembrances. And amidst these memorials of such a waste, we must indeed be cold, if there do not arise some mournful thoughts at the fate which has wrapped their parent-lands. The country, which was once so conquered by the enthusiasm of the free orator, hears no more the language which was its boast, the pure dialect survives, but not on the lips of its inhabitants—it survives in that very eloquence, which has made modern times excuse the extravagance of ancient fable, by beholding with what materials it was enabled to work—it survives in poetry, in history,—but in poetry, in history alone.

Never more shall the bema be trodden by a Demosthenes, never more shall the true Attic, pouring forth from the commonest mouth, prove the universality of Athenian refinement; nor, if we turn to the rival nation, shall those seven hills glitter again with the magnificent ornaments of freedom, or echo the step of the Roman citizen greater than kings. These thoughts arise at once in our minds, and give a sacred interest to the volumes we are perusing. They alone are the temples of their gods; for their religion has faded, its fanes are no longer warmed with offered victims, and another creed has usurped its few remaining shrines; they too are alone the monuments of the illustrious great of ancient times, for their country, language, and virtues have departed, and their fame has rested alone upon the preservation of these few and perishable memorials. Is it not melancholy to consider that these models of genius, these founders of modern literature and refinement, have depended for their existence upon the capricious care of men who knew not their value, which a few

more ages of neglect might have swept to oblivion? It is this feeling of sorrow which has thrown round them such a fascination, that to the youthful mind accustomed to contemplate them, neither the power of fashion, the witching smile of beauty, nor the ardour of passion have been able to divert it. They have for him the same sacred charm as the ashes of those he loves; and, while he is perusing the memorials of the mighty spirits of old, time flies unheeded, and every thought devotes itself to them. It is this circumstance which has operated unfavourably on Classical studies; they have tended too much, when long indulged, to isolate the scholar from the rest of the world, and to engross him entirely with these delightful pursuits. He has turned from the common-places of society with a heightened relish to a library stored with his loved companions, and has at every fresh mingling with the world derived but a stronger taste for such indulgence. There indeed he found few to sympathize in his inclinations—the business of the day excludes from the worldly mind the thought

of, or care for, the records of long-past genius, and he shrunk, with the modesty natural to the scholar, from contemptuous or overbearing pride. With what a freshened love has he then had recourse, to sooth his chafed spirits, to these his unchanging friends; with how much alacrity has he rushed to lose himself in Grecian or Roman story, or in the divine illusions of ancient poetry or philosophy, till his mind has recovered its tone, and he has become once more self-satisfied. He has thus learnt too much to estrange himself from intercourse with the world, and Classical attainments are thus most frequently found in the cell of the university, or the shades of literary retirement. It is not that they require more study than other pursuits,—the professional man is in his art as deeply read, and has as maturely reflected; but his subjects have drawn him more into human commerce, and the free interchange of thought has corrected his own prejudices equally with those of others. But the field of the scholar lies exclusively at home. His shelves contain the precepts of his art,

and the reward of his toils; to their contents he looks for applause, and gaining it he is indifferent to that of the world. His learning seldom comes forth into public notice, except in that exclusive way, which seems to claim attention from none but those engaged in similar studies. But in return, if the devotion to Classical pursuits has confined their admirer too much to his library, and thus rendered him deficient in the courtly graces, which distinguish and recommend other men of letters, they have rescued many a youth from dissipation, and given him a purer taste for the charms of literature. Virtue often retires from crowds and public places to clothe these relics with stronger power. And where could she seek a more congenial home, than pages rich with the eloquence of Plato, or the half-inspired wisdom of Socrates? And if indeed her chosen temple be the mouldering ruins of a nation's works, whence her influence arises teaching the most thoughtless to tread with reverence; must we not think that there is her more peculiar shrine where the monuments of human genius, in

their original perfection, spread themselves open to tell to man, how vain is power, military, political, or intellectual, to give stability to empire,—to tell him not to presume to pray for his own country an immortal existence, but such a course of honourable conduct, as that when its language and inhabitants shall equally have departed, its history, its literature, and its public virtue, may shed an eternal twilight around its sun-set glories.

Little does he, who floats on the unsteady tide of fashion or dissipation, know of the charms of Classical studies. He pictures them forth as the seat of gloomy and misanthropic thoughts, where a monkish ignorance of the pleasures of the world fixes the neglected or disappointed scholar. Or perhaps proud of the petty distinction which awaits him in the gay circle, he smiles upon him with contempt as a bookworm, who has not the spirit, not the soul to enjoy the charms of life. Not the soul! When the scholar has retired to the sanctuary, where are entombed the sacred dead, think you that his meditations are likewise

dead? Oh! no, every beautiful and virtuous thought takes a new wing, here the mind new plumes her faculties, and starts forth for higher discoveries, and his soul, expatiating on the great expanse of vanished years, gathers from every one its lesson of morality or wisdom. For amid all the ages which pass in review before him, there is not a year which does not bring some food for holy meditation,—and not an event which is treasured in these volumes, that does not present something of example to guide him. Not the soul! From that study, where mind alone surviving teaches how truly dust is every thing material and sensual, he views a world engaged in the short-lived trophies of earthly ambition, or worse, in miserable dissipation,—but upon him shines a brighter star, those volumes scatter out a purer light, and vice is revealed in her deformity,—but mind, mind triumphs —and the short record of it, which may be compressed in a square inch of paper, has come to his hands, when an Atlantis has been engulfed, when the pyramids have trembled to their bases, and cities—were

they not called eternal?—have been rooted from their foundations.

Condemn not then as useless the attachment to Classical studies, nor be willing to reject that which has been the guide and the solace of the most powerful intellects. Among its admirers may be numbered the greatest names in modern letters. The poet has recurred to it for his most agreeable allusions, the statesman for his best examples, the orator for his most inspiring themes, while the man of literary taste has never tired of repeating its praises and dwelling upon its glowing fancies. Scaliger declared that he would rather be the author of two odes of Horace, than king of Spain. The scholar in his retirement, as he broods over them, finds his mind enlarged, his taste refined, and his patriotism strengthened. He shines with a borrowed lustre; we wonder at the elevation of his genius, and the fine flights of fancy, but they are not his own,—no, he has caught them from immortal pages, and an enthusiasm enlightened and generous spreads over his style such an eloquence, that the dullest is kindled by it.

His noble thoughts he claims for himself,—but believe him not; he has been consulting greater and more enduring geniuses,—he comes from the company of the highly-gifted minds, and whatever is striking and beautiful they have communicated. Visions of every thing great and good stand before him, and the spirit which brightens their pages hovers around him like the dæmon of Socrates, giving peace to his heart; richness to his images, and delicacy to his fancy.

LECTURE II.

In considering the influence which the Revival of Classical Letters has exercised upon the literature, the arts, and the modes of thinking of Europe, to which I designed to devote this lecture, there arise so many various and striking results, that a full examination of them would far exceed its limits. The era of their revival is prolific in improvements. Law, every branch of industry, politics, the fine arts, date their advance from it, and it would be no trivial discussion to ascertain how much is owing by each to Classical Literature. But it is necessary to circumscribe the circle of inquiry to a few of the parts, instead of endeavouring to embrace the whole.

The most obvious of these results are the refinement of taste, and the improvement of literature. Omitting for the present the more prominent topics, I would wish, though at the risk of tediousness, to turn aside to one, which, if less inviting, is certainly curious, the influence of this revival upon scholarship. How is it, that among the men most conversant with Classic studies, and therefore best fitted to apply to the perfecting of their native literature, the true taste, the judicious precepts, the beautiful examples, which there abound, the votaries of Greek and Roman Letters have confined themselves to the dullest part of criticism, losing in the contemplation of words the strength and fire of consummate genius? We may well believe, that if the spirits of the most eminent writers in ancient times could have new-embodied themselves, and visibly appeared to some of their commentators, they would have besought them to spare the toilsome labour of giving insipidity to their fancies, diluting their best thoughts by endless disquisitions, and barbarously mutilating the noblest productions for the sake of their own petty

inventions. It is difficult to view without astonishment men degrading the finest talents in unimportant disputes, placing their chief merit in an obscure quotation, or chanting pæans for a happy conjecture. This class of scholars owes its existence entirely to Classic Letters, and it may not be unprofitable to trace their origin and influence on literature.

Greece was early distinguished by the rise of a set of men, who, under the name of grammarians, opened regular schools for the illustration of the distinguished authors of their country. These schools, which often acquired great celebrity, were filled with pupils, whose exercise it was to write complete commentaries on any given author. These commentaries were hence called scholia, and the writers received the name of scholiasts. In these scholia, acuteness and ingenuity were exerted rather than taste, though the higher order of grammarians often exhibited a cultivated discrimination and judgment. But in general they were much more addicted to the less elevated parts of criticism. Some of them became highly eminent, and main-

tained a perfect despotism in the republic of letters. They flourished most after Greece had lost its liberty. Their minds, no longer lifted by the excitements of free institutions, turned their natural acuteness to safer though less noble studies, and as their country exhibited no new glories to require the inspiring themes of poetry, they were satisfied with elucidating and dwelling upon the works, which were the remembrancers of former trophies. Around the court of the Ptolemies, where a lesser constellation was shining, and the Pleiades, as seven of its poets were then called, were shedding a more mellowed light, a famous band of grammarians arose to give a new lustre to study. At the head of this school was Aristarchus, the greatest name in grammarian learning, and saluted by the voice of posterity as the first of critics. At his nod a ready crowd of worshipping followers awaited, sealing with an irrevocable doom the unhappy author whose polish did not reach to the required perfection. Upon every line of Homer he sat in judgment, drawing the dreadful *obelos* (in which practice he has been but too well imitated by

his modern successors) through whatever displeased his imperial will, and condemning it to eternal exile. He pretended that his taste was alone sufficient to separate the genuine from the false, and relying upon this guide he threw away this book—he obliterated this verse, or rooted from its established place an offending word. But from time immemorial they had been considered as Homer's, and where was the testimony he adduced against their authority? None, but his judgment—and that judgment was taught to counterbalance all the prescription of 500 years. It was approved, his fiat was ratified by a host of obedient and αυτος εφα pupils of the eminent leader. Thus we see in the prince of the grammarians the same qualities, which afterwards characterized the scholars who devoted themselves to the illustration of the Classics; the same arbitrary temper, the same blind opinion of his own skill, and the same disposition to rely entirely on his own judgment. Yet of the laborious learning, the devotion to study, of Aristarchus and his attending tribe, we should not be forgetful. Still, to him I am often disposed, excuse an

unexercised judgment upon a point which has employed the greatest scholars, to attribute the controversy of the authenticity of the poems of Homer, which a German Aristarchus has so ably revived. Doubts cast upon the genuineness of parts have been naturally transferred to the whole. From him certainly has flowed the unmerciful privilege, most unmercifully exercised by modern critics, of mutilating at their fancy the author who is exposed to their dissections, so that the poor ancient would hardly recognise his own productions.

The grammarians filled the pages of the books they possessed with their learned glosses, interpreting to please themselves or their masters, or for the instruction of others the doubtful passages. They thus formed a regularly organized corps, accomplished in every branch of recondite learning, versed in all the turns and varieties of their uncertain mythology, and eager to signalize their Grecian subtlety, but unfortunately too apt to waste them all in verbal pedantry, in seeking out unintended allegories and curious meanings, rather than in analyzing the beauties of thought or style. Various

readings were their passion, and to show off an immense but unwieldy learning upon indifferent matters their ambition; but as for striking fancies, poetical inspirations, or delicate imagery, they had no joy in them. To explain, and in that explanation to puzzle out a dozen interpretations of a passage, obvious at first sight, was their aim, and their education was well adapted to assist them. For if the pupil came to comment upon a poet on whom various commentaries, previously made, lay before him, how could he distinguish himself, how display his favourite subtlety, if not by adding to the store of scholia a new interpretation, however improbable? And what could be more calculated to deaden in him every rising taste, than to set him to sift uncertain words and phrases to discover in them some unthought of meaning? In such an examination the godlike charms of poetry evaporate, while the dull grammarian is weighing every line with tedious accuracy. What a disgust to the tasteful scholar, when in the full glow of a passage of Pindar he is hurried rapidly along the tide of song, if perchance some doubtful word breaks the

enchantment, and forces him to turn for explanation to the scholiast, to find indeed the meaning there—but no answering fire—no sympathizing fancies—no rapturous exclamations at the power of poetry. The grammarian never lifts himself above the earth, but levels every thing in meagre and unsatisfying criticism, while the brilliant thought passes him unheeded. These men (let me not call them pedants, for with all their faults our learning is greatly indebted to them) seem not to have imagined that there was any other object in commenting on an author, than, like the connoisseur sandal-maker of Athens whose eye rested on the slipper of the Venus of Apelles, to examine the outward part, the words which envelope his thoughts. But the magic spirit, which wakes the inspired chords of lyric harmony, neither elevates nor animates their notes—but dully they linger on the material part, while the soul of song escapes their grosser touch. These scholiasts, flourishing as they did in Greek and Roman times, survived the destruction of letters, and kept up at Constantinople a continued succession of learned men, al-

most solely bent on the illustration of the works of others. Their feeble empire offered no triumphs to commemorate, and their servile minds, still boasting the proverbial acuteness of their glorious ancestors, were content in bestowing it on the interpretation of their works. At length this empire was overthrown, and these learned Greeks were obliged to transplant to a foreign soil their language and their literary habits. The business of the scholiast was dignified by being sustained by these restorers of Grecian learning, and they gave an apology, or rather a stimulus, to the Italian scholar, to contribute in a like degree to the letters of the world, by employing himself in a similar way. The adoration—and were they not excusable in their adoration—of these venerable relics, which became the root of every scion of modern improvement, made the scholar consider nothing as beneath him which tended to elucidate them, and place more glory in ably commenting on them, than in plucking the greenest laurels in modern letters. Another cause may have operated in producing the laborious commentator,

who has by modern wit been severely, and not always justly, ridiculed. In the revival of Classic learning, many men of deep education, who had almost from infancy been taught to consider a Greek or Latin author as one of a superior class of human minds, soon became conscious of the total inadequacy of their own powers by original works to rival these splendid models. They therefore had recourse to a less difficult task, in which the manner and extent of their instruction soon enabled them to excel, of taking advantage of the great reputation attached to erudition, by filling those authors with learned explanations. They thus at the same time devoted their industry and knowledge to less hazardous experiments, and entitled themselves to the gratitude of the world, adorning at once and supported by the pillars of their fame. But the learning they acquired they knew not properly to digest—if it was ancient, if it was the result of severe and closeted study, it was equally as estimable in their eyes, whether it treated of the sublime conceptions of the Platonic philosophy, or of the crown and garlands which freshened

and perfumed the feasts of antiquity—the source and not the quality formed its value. Controversies were waged between these scholars, not concerning the interesting questions of the knowledge and religion of the ancients, but upon the establishment of this or that sentence, the excellence of this manuscript, the genuineness of an unimportant work. Their object was more to display their own learning than to add new lights to others, and words frequently engrossed a greater attention than ideas. The Italians were the first to revive this faded grammarian school, but when the novelty of Classical studies wore off, their enthusiasm went with it, and the duller but more deep and solid minds of the German scholars were attracted, and were soon, delightedly to themselves, and admiringly by the great body of the learned world, involved in the inextricable labyrinth of verbal interpretation and correction. Although the Germans certainly deserve the laurel, if there be one, for pre-eminence in this part of study, and the larger portion of best editions of Classical authors (by which are meant those editions which contain one

hundred words of comment to one word of text) has proceeded from the German press, England has not been without her full share of these critics. She has produced two most perfect specimens of the lower and higher orders of modern grammarians, Joshua Barnes and Richard Bentley.

Barnes possessed all the industry of his predecessors; manuscripts without number were scattered in his study, while he almost yearly presented the world with specimens of his various literary experiments. No region of letters he left unvisited, but it was his acquaintance with the Greek language, in which he placed his greatest glory. Homer especially was the object of his adoration: his earliest desire, and it was continued through a laborious life of study, was to leave behind him a perfect edition of his works. To illustrate this master-poet forty years of his life were dedicated, and though poor, and dependant on a salary, as Greek Professor, of forty pounds a year, he contrived to spend on this single edition 1000 pounds. It is indeed a splendid book, and filled with the exhaustless research of its author, but, like the scholiasts

whom he imitated, it is the various readings, the differing interpretations, which occupy his notes, while the sublimity, the imagination, and beauty of his bard fade from before his sight. Writing and speaking Greek with as much facility as English, yet he was pronounced by the true critic to have no knowledge of the language. But I willingly pass from Barnes to the pride of English scholars, Dr. Bentley.

Dr. Bentley possessed all the learning of Barnes, but ridiculed the knowledge which was confined to words, and declared the skill of Barnes in Greek to amount to no more than that of an Athenian blacksmith, while his own researches, guided equally by taste and the ambition of learning, carried him to every part and corner of ancient literature. A Pythagorean, observing his acuteness, the true grammarian quality, and his superior mind, would have thought him endowed with the very spirit of Aristarchus, from his reckless corrections, and his dogmatical obliterations. He seemed to look upon the models of ancient taste as set before him merely for the display of ingenuity, and, where he could exercise

this, he was indifferent to all the opinions and all the authority of critics and manuscripts. Yet he was notwithstanding a man of admirable talents, which would have made him eminent in whatever branch of literature he had chosen to attempt. He has left some lines of English poetry, which, though they prove the vigour of his understanding rather than his fancy, are evidences of the excellence, which, if he had thus bent his mind, he might have attained. But it was to Classical Letters that he turned as to the most congenial, though perhaps less useful study. A wide field was there before him, and buried in the learned recesses of Trinity College at Cambridge, like another Aristarchus, he issued his decrees, while the admiring pedant idolized the man who graced with such talents his dull profession; and the true scholar, grieved yet gratified, lamented the sternness and dogmatism of his character, though he could not help being grateful for the information which he had so amply stored for the benefit of the lettered world. Poets and satirists soon took hold of the foibles which the rashness and self-sufficiency of

this great man were continually unveiling, and poured around him many a bitter arrow in revenge for unconcealed contempt; but like a lion he shook them off powerless, or sent them back in tenfold strength, careless of present fame, secure of the applause of posterity. So certain was he of the enduring reputation his talents had acquired and must acquire, that he scorned to answer calumny, conscious that his venerable name would alone arrest the calumniator from oblivion. His pride was unextinguishable, and to his disdain of keeping secret his opinions he owed all the satire, which tried, but tried in vain, to crush him. Pope, exasperated by his condemnation of the translation of the Iliad, added a fourth book to the Dunciad to annihilate him; and Boyle, seconded by all the wits in England, seized occasion from some dogmatical opinions most superciliously expressed, to write the sharpest book of satire which the world has seen since the days of Archilochus. To the first Bentley replied not; but to the last he gave such an answer, that I know not, to any man who examines the controversy dispassionately, a more perfect triumph in the

annals of literature. Bentley, alone and unassisted against all the wit and learning of England, then abounding in wits, arrayed against him, was like Jupiter, balancing and sustaining the whole weight of inferior deities. A learning so prompt, so perfectly at command, has rarely been witnessed, and while the carelessness of his assertions continually laid him open to controversy, he had a confidence in his strength of mind that made him indifferent who attacked him, or whom he attacked;

> ——————non ulla conjecta movebant
> Tela, neque adverso glomerati ex agmine Graii.

It was not however to the commentator that this ardour for ancient learning was in the infancy of its revival confined. An universal spirit then seemed to reign, of imitating these re-opened authors—their thoughts were a thousand times repeated, and often in their very words, in the servile copies of their worshippers. The language was alone deemed worthy of an ambitious writer, which had been consecrated by embodying the great reflections and memorials of antiquity; and nothing could be

considered out of the reach of neglect, which was not treasured in one of these perfect tongues. They had floated unharmed, while numberless intermediate barbarous dialects had perished, and they almost contained a spell to bid defiance to oblivion for the works that were composed in them. The languages of modern Europe, still fluctuating and unfixed, nor boasting of the lasting models that could establish them sacred from change, gave despair to the aspiring minds, that any works in these languages could receive sufficient durability to outlive even their authors—and they felt an ambition, a rivalship honourable even when unsuccessful, that their productions should descend to posterity, by the side of, and to be compared with, their noble prototypes. Such writings as were the offspring of leisure hours, or of relaxation from higher studies, or which were thrown carelessly forth, little considered by the composers, were given in the vernacular tongue; but such as tested eminence in genius or learning, and were to live forever as masterpieces of the time, such must be transmitted in the venerated accents of ancient

Rome. Dante, we may venture to believe, would have written his Divina Commedia in Latin hexameters, if the interruptions and sorrows of a twenty years' exile had allowed it. He actually left several verses at the commencement of the Inferno translated by himself, thus evidencing his wish to perpetuate, as he would have considered it, his golden work. Boccaccio, too, prepared all the laborious parts of his writings, on which his glory was to rest, in Latin, and would have scoffed at the idea, that the work composed for the amusement of Italian ladies would survive the learned investigations and commentaries of so many years of study. In like manner Petrarca bequeathed his reputation to his Latin productions. Yet often the learned author, with all his partiality for these compositions, could not but perceive the inferiority of his Latin verses to those of the Augustan age; thus Petrarca, many years after the completion of his Africa, a poem, the favourite of princes, and the admiration of every European scholar, hearing some of its lines sung at Verona, wept with grief that he could not forever bury it from the world.

It is surprising that the restorers of learning, who followed within two or three centuries these lights of the world, did not from their examples discover the impossibility of equalling, or even of emulating, the ancient writers in the ancient languages. A language is always adapted to the genius of the country which uses it. Different in the infancy of civilization from that of a highly cultivated state of society, it assimilates itself to every change, and alters its form and compass with every progressive advancement in refinement. The language of Chaucer is not our polished English—it is barren and rough in comparison—nor is the prose of Boccaccio, all smooth and harmonious as it is, the present tongue of Italy. As the people lose their rudeness, their tongue loses its original tone, and adopts another more congenial; it attends them in every incursion into the fields of science and letters, and gains from each some conquest—from this, grace, from another, flexibility—rising with every nobler taste, and adding to its richness from every generous art. But a dead language is unsusceptible of these alterations, as we

receive so we must preserve it. Admirably adapted, as the Latin is, for expressing with force and freedom the manners of its parent nation, it is stiff and indocile when violently transplanted to a foreign country. Full and complete as regards the ancient customs, it cannot suit itself to the complicated and intricate structure of modern institutions, moulded out of systems of which the Romans never dreamt. The expressions lose their force—they do not apply in their extent to the interpretation a Roman would give them; they belong to antiquity, to its mighty works, to its fanciful mythology, and all the superstitions and traditions of an unenlightened world. But the great difficulty with regard to an ancient language is, that we cannot invent new terms for new ideas. We are forced to distort them to mean something different from their original significations, and one word may therefore have a double sense, an old, as it was understood in ancient days, a new, as it is applied to modern thoughts. The extreme admiration of the Augustan writers increased the difficulty. Every one was ambitious of writing prose like Cicero's,

and poetry like Virgil's, and therefore the successful author was sure to be a copyist—the more perfect the imitation the greater was the skill. Hence originality was less sought than purity. The scholar was fearful of employing a new phrase, lest it should be a solecism—a new term he dared not invent, and the vocabulary he possessed shrunk from the different and improved state of society.

The same admiration, which made them waste their learning in imitations of the language and ideas of their models, gave importance to the most trivial circumstances connected with antiquity. Disputes arose concerning points, which were mere matters of taste, or which were not of sufficient consequence to merit them. Poggio and Guarino waged a violent warfare with each other, in which every term of abuse was exhausted, upon the question whether the elder Scipio was to be preferred to Julius Cæsar.

In consequence of this unmeasured love, and the eagerness with which the discovery of an unknown author was hailed, many impositions, either sportive or designed, were

practised upon learned men. Muretus gave to the great Scaliger some Iambic verses, which Scaliger published with much parade as the fragment of an old tragedian; and almost immediately after Muretus acknowledged the imposture. A small poem de Lite being placed in the hands of Boxhornius, the learned German wrote a full commentary, as on a valuable relic of some ancient author; but soon the labour was found to be vain, as it was ascertained to be the production of Hospitalius, a Chancellor of France.* Alberti, an Italian scholar, composed in 1425 a Latin comedy called Philodoxios, of which he circulated copies among his friends, as the work of a Roman poet named Lepidus. It was received as genuine and loaded with vast applause—Lepidus was elevated into a comparison with Plautus and Terence, and even a century after the younger Aldus printed it, gravely acknowledging in the preface his ignorance of the comic poet Lepidus.† A stratagem of a similar kind is said to have been successfully attempted

* Bentley's Dissertation on Phalaris.

† Roscoe's Lorenzo de Medici.

by Michel Angelo. Incensed at the jealous criticism with which his rivals endeavoured to depreciate his productions, he finished in secrecy a statue of Bacchus, and breaking off one of its arms, buried it where he knew it would soon be dug up. It was found, and proclaimed by the united voice of the connoisseurs, to be superior to every work of modern sculptor, when Michel Angelo very calmly produced the broken arm, and enjoyed in silent triumph their discomfiture.

While on this subject it may not be inapposite to mention the following curious mistake.* At the time when the fragments of Petronius Arbiter were making a noise in the learned world, Meibomius, a Professor of Lubec, chanced to light on this passage in a letter from a Bolognese scholar: "We have here at Bologna an entire Petronius." Meibomius, filled with the literary mania, and fearing to be anticipated, starts post-haste for Italy, arrives at Bologna, and at once inquires for the librarian Capponi. "Have you," said he, "an entire Petronius?" "It is indeed true," replied the librarian. "Take me then at once to

see it," exclaimed Meibomius in all the extasies of delightful expectation. Capponi escorts the Lubec Professor to the cathedral, and pointing to a cemetery said, "Here lies the real body of Saint Petronius." Meibomius, speechless with the disappointment, turned upon his heel, and the same day saw him some leagues from Bologna.

In fact the ancient idolatry seemed now revived, with a change only of the objects of worship—the idols were the dead. Each scholar selected some individual of antiquity, for whom he felt an unbounded veneration. Petrarca was an enthusiast of Cicero, Poggio of Pindar, Politian of Horace. Navagero yearly on his birth-day performed a solemn sacrifice to Virgil. Surrounded by his friends, after an eulogium on the honoured bard, he ordered a copy of Martial to be brought to him, and, throwing it into the flames, added, that he considered as the most acceptable offering to the manes of Virgil, the destruction of a volume filled with so much affectation and false taste.*

* Stradæ Prolusion.

From this, according to Lord Bacon,* sprung the excessive love of purity, which led more to niceness of style than attention to thought. Cicero's works were read time after time, more in order to catch the harmony of his periods and a familiarity with choice phrases, than to taste the beauties of his philosophy or the charms of his eloquence. Among the scholars whose names are most regarded by the lovers of Classical Letters, as their ornament and critic, Erasmus first perceived the folly of this over-chasteness of phraseology, and bent the finest weapons of his satire against the immoderate imitation of Cicero. His Ciceronianus was written to expose the absurdity, where he introduced "the scoffing echo" to the Ciceronian's exclamation, "Decem annos consumpsi in legendo Cicerone," replying in Greek Ὄνε, asine.

So far was this idolatry carried by the scholars who restored ancient literature, that many serious men began to be alarmed lest Paganism should re-establish itself, and the worship of Jupiter and his attending train supersede the religion of Christ.

* Of the Advancement of Learning, book i.

This apprehension, which was among others expressed by the great Erasmus, was not altogether so visionary as in this age of information it may appear. There have been many, who, born in a Christian country, yet seduced by the charm of poetical mythology, have wandered back into the footsteps of an ancient faith. Among the admirers whom the eloquence of Plato attracted, one, Gemisthus Pletho, in the fifteenth century, enraptured with his noble abstractions, considered himself as a second prophet born to bring back mankind to the creed of his favourite philosopher. A contemporary, enemy alike to Plato and Gemisthus, thus records his opinions; "I have heard him myself, when we were together at Florence, say, that in a short time all men would embrace one common religion, which should be so simple as to allure every one by its mere exposition. I inquired, adds the narrator, if it would be the religion of Christ or of Mahomet? He replied, Neither; but a third, little differing from Paganism." In the book containing an account of his system, which was publicly burnt after his death, he is said to have

advocated Polytheism, and over the various orders of deities to have set one supreme king whom he styled Zeus or Jupiter; thus adopting the belief and nomenclature of ancient worship. The following is another instance of the effect of Classic studies in tincturing religion with pagan errors. In the reign of Louis XII., a native of Abbeville, named Hemon de la Fosse, by continually perusing and dwelling on the ancient writers, at last persuaded himself that the religion of Homer, Cicero, and Virgil, could not but be true. One day in 1503, being at church, he suddenly snatched the host from the hands of the astonished priest as he was raising it, exclaiming, "Away with this mummery." He was seized, imprisoned in the hope that he would abjure his folly, but in vain; he persisted that Jupiter was the Father of Heaven, and the Elysian Fields the Paradise of the Blest. He was condemned by the cruelty of the time to expiate his absurd fanaticism at the stake, a martyr to the religion of Greece and Rome.*

* D'Israeli's Curiosities of Literature.

These extravagances, excusable as proceeding from the first glances of those precious authors who were fraught with so many and so various improvements to mankind, were at length worn off by the more familiar acquaintance with them. A more enlightened spirit of criticism was lent by the Classical pages to open the eyes as well to their faults as their excellencies. The impropriety of quitting the modern languages for the dead became manifest—the native tongue of the writer was considered by him the most suitable vehicle to convey his thoughts to the world, but the influence of ancient literature was not thereby diminished. No longer the plodding scholar appropriated to himself the joys of learning, but Classic Letters made themselves felt in the beauties of modern composition; they were seen giving method, delicacy, and ornament to poetry, opening exhaustless sources of liberal enthusiasm and inspiring eloquence. Taste smiled once again on the shores of Italy, and from thence spread her influence to every clime, throwing back the monastic gloom and scholastic

subtleties of ages of barbarism. Divine philosophy, assisted and enlightened by a truer religion, sprung from the mistaken yet sublime opinions of ancient times, to elevate and instruct mankind. The beauties which no age can dim, the fire which no neglect can extinguish, were transferred to rival pages. Science started from the goal set before her to take a farther progress than antiquity ever witnessed; while freedom, that kindling spark, which illumes the Classic volumes, and which never fails to find some proper fuel in the generous breast, taught the scholar to pride himself in the noble annals of republican, of self-governing peoples. Simplicity of thought and style was again admired, the false and affected glare of tawdry ornament faded before the superior elegance and chasteness of these early models. Precepts were supplied to guide the author, of the excellence of which the works, which contained or obeyed them, were the tests. As in the ancient sculptured images the exquisite proportions, and all the symmetry of consummate skill, matchless even in the minutest details, become the standards of modern

art, despairing while it follows them; so in the various parts of literature, the arrangements, the divisions, the rules of antiquity, are always the foundation of our criticism, and frequently its limit. Often do we find that to alter is not to improve; and as we look on our own literature, modelled upon that of the Classic ages, yet from the superior information and better feelings of improved religion and society, breathing a juster spirit; we are reminded of some Christian temple built in the pure taste of Grecian art, whose ornaments and supports are still the Ionian columns, cut from the quarries which produced the Parthenon, but changed, nobly changed in the form and character of its worship.

Yet if the taste for antiquity has exercised so propitious an influence on modern letters, it has been productive of some disadvantage. It has opened an immense field for imitation. It has excused the servile follower of Classic images and Classic themes, by displaying such a range of ideas, that he who thinks not deeply will think the power of creation exhausted; will give up the hope of originality, and

look for fame in tracking ancient steps. He will think every subject of morals and politics pursued to its extent; the imageries of poetry all pre-occupied, and as he finds a favourite thought which he had appropriated to himself, rooted up from the Classic soil by some restless antiquary, he will be apt to exclaim with the modern wit, "Cursed be these ancients who have stolen my best thoughts." That this has been the consequence of Classical learning must be acknowledged; and many a scholar has wished for the burning of the already-treasured knowledge of the world, that the earth, its flowers, and its scenery, and the beautiful phenomena of nature, might be opened again for fanciful theory, or for poetical embellishment. Does a fine idea now rise in the ardent imagination—beware, it may be discovered in the middle of Homer—or Pindar, Virgil, or Tully, may be evoked from the tomb to convict you of plagiarism. Do the stars, in the inspiring hours of a summer's mildness, suggest some image bright as themselves, or does the moon as she beams on you awake some stirring fancy, or the note of a favourite

air wafted from a distance almost convert you to believe in the music of nature—exult not too much—all these scenes have been witnessed, have been described, by poets more imaginative than yourself, and the fable of the music of the spheres was invented by Orpheus some 3000 years ago.* So it is that the imagination is thwarted, and the malicious critic, beyond every other delight, loves to trace the progress of a thought, as it first originated in Greek or Roman times, and has improved or degenerated in its transmission to ourselves.

It is to poetry that Classical Letters have most to answer. The light which they caused to stream on mankind, and the appetite for knowledge they awakened, broke up at once all the illusions which gave to common objects the poetical colouring of hope and fear. They led men more to think, more to limit the rovings of fiction, more to consult the realities of things; and fancy, ere she dared to indulge in her wild chimeras, was forced to ask of reason whether what she was to relate was probable. New inventions were cut off, and

* So says Servius in Æneid VI. v. 645.

combinations were to be made of the already-acquired knowledge, nor could the adventurous spirit add to it of its own creations, since men became too wise to be imposed on. The poet no more could call from the tomb the restless spirit to predict the future, while the listener gazed in silent horror at the visitant of another world. The extravagance might perhaps be afterwards allowed, but it was not believed—the magic wand ceased to enchant—the invisible ring worked no charm—and the necromancer's art, fortified by spells potent as the grave, and the whole train of supernatural agents, no more could terrify. They were spirits that fled at the approach of dawn, and superstition, unable to brook the revival of ancient learning, called them away with her to seek some darker region. But as she went, poetry lost half its terrors—it could indeed speak to the guilty conscience, but the victim no longer fled horror-struck from the unearthly spectre or the hovering demon ready to seize on him.

But ancient letters did not rob modern poetry merely of these, but it extinguished the most beautiful fancy, which mankind

perhaps ever conceived, a fancy, too, nearly allied to the finest Classical fictions. I mean the belief of Fairies. These imaginary beings, which resembled some of the nymphs of former times, gave a delightful hue to poetry and romance. A sort of guardian spirits to the good—delicate in form, beneficent in action—preserving from the dominion of evil passions, and appearing like angels in the time of danger or temptation, to assist in the one, to repel the other; they yet almost approached to humanity in a hundred little caprices and foibles, which but made them the more interesting. They did not confine themselves to the gay and the noble, the feudal chieftain and the castled splendour, but they mixed themselves with rustic sports, they sweetened rustic labour—they gave a higher interest to every more verdant spot, to each fairer scene. Upon the green turf their frolic ring was traced, or perhaps dissatisfied with earth, they winged their fanciful flight to the realms of fairy-land. There whatever of beauty of scenery, of delicacy of taste, of perfection of colour and perfume, the rich imagination of the poet could

devise, these fairy-forms went to enjoy—returning for deeds of kindness, and often, when some stainless knight pleased them, or some lovely damsel asked their protection, they would steal them from the mingled sorrow and joy of the world, and carry them to their fairy shores of unchanging felicity. To these Classical Letters gave an irrecoverable shock. The whole current of fancy turned a different way. The Naiads and Mountain-Nymphs expelled them from their rural haunts, while the Elysian Fields and the Islands of the Blest usurped the fairy regions. They expired, graceful and fragile beings, under the universal neglect; but now and then some gentle enthusiast still arises, who hallows their memory, and loves to trace their long-lingering steps in their ancient spots, as he mourns their departure. In place of them, and of the other fictions of less enlightened times, the more delicate parts of the Classic mythology came to assist the poet. Daphnes arose in the vacant grove—not a fountain could be seen stealing its silent course but a nymph was invited to bathe in it; and the hoary river-god was invoked to streams,

whose barbarian names, in Grecian days, would have frightened him from their waves. In the pastoral, imitative, vainly imitative, of the nature-breathing Idyls of Theocritus, the ancient gods and goddesses were called upon by Christian shepherds, and welcomed to plains which they had never visited. There seemed a magic in certain names, which were rung from mouth to mouth in endless changes; while actual belief and the pretended rapture in mythological fancies strangely warred, or were mingled in grotesque confusion. Here a saint—there a heathen god,—here a virgin-martyr—there a Venus—found themselves unnaturally pressed into each other's society, and poetry became a sort of mosaic-work, where pieces of every figure and colour were smoothed over and laid together on a common ground.

Not that the revival of ancient fictions is indiscriminately to be condemned. There are spots and scenes whose every association is so connected with them, that no lapse of time, no change of religion, can dispossess the imaginary inhabitants. The ruined temple, whose pillars are sinking

one by one in the dust, will ever call to mind the god once deemed to abide there; the Athenian Acropolis, topped as it is with Christian shrines and Mahometan mosques, will still be kindling the Classic imagination with the presence of Minerva; the grot of Egeria will be haunted by the nymph who inspired laws of peace and softened rites to the mild governor of a martial people; and the waters of Clitumnus, which bathed the victim ere it led the triumphing Roman to the capitol, hallowed to the god of its fountains by a temple, injured but not destroyed by time, will awake some ancient superstitions, and for a moment revive the ancient idolatry. Here the poet may revel unchecked, and bring up from their sunken habitations, once more to circle round him, the visionary forms of elder days:—

> But thou, Clitumnus! in thy sweetest wave
> Of the most living crystal that was e'er
> The haunt of river nymph, to gaze and lave
> Her limbs where nothing hid them, thou dost rear
> Thy grassy banks, whereon the milk-white steer
> Grazes; the purest god of gentle waters!———
> And on thy happy shore a temple still,
> Of small and delicate proportion, keeps——
> Its memory of thee.————

Pass not unblest the Genius of the place!
If through the air a zephyr more serene
Win to the brow, 'tis his; and if ye trace
Along his margin a more eloquent green,
If on the heart the freshness of the scene
Sprinkle its coolness, and from the dry dust
Of weary life a moment lave it clean
With Nature's baptism,—'tis to him ye must
Pay orisons for this suspension of disgust.*

Literature now too lost the rich and gorgeous colours of romance. The institutions which had been so favourable, the manners which had been so adapted, to picturesque description, vanished gradually before the increase of knowledge. The outlaw, with his bow and clothyard shaft, and his dress of green, wandering through the forests, and gracing a hundred acts of violence with one of generosity, was banished from the poetic pages. The warlike tournament, where the feat of valour and skill drew down the applause of nobles and the fairest dames, mingled with the throng of an empire's population—the splendid device —the waving pennon—the noble exercises of chivalry, where perils were braved for the sake of rescuing a stranger, and the knightly arm was renowned in the minstrel-

* Childe Harold, Canto IV.

song as the avenger of the oppressed—where the bright eye was the motive and reward of heroic achievement, and the silken scarf or the token-ring more prized than a monarch's favour—fled from the eye of fancy, and every-day manners, and the substantial comforts of social life followed the entrance of Classical Letters. The laws of ancient Rome, now discovered and perused, were applied to mitigate the harshness of the feudal system. Society was established on a safer but a less imaginative footing, and religion became more spiritual, abounding less in the superstitions and mysteries which made it so poetical. No religious pilgrims were seen mingling together of every variety and class of mankind—the scallop shell and the palmer's staff did not come to repay the nightly hospitality with tales of enchantment tinted with the brilliant hues of Eastern fable, while the wondering auditors trembled at the mighty name of Saladin, or transported themselves to the holy sepulchre, and fancied the palms of Judah shaking over their heads. The way-worn traveller did not unlock before the envying eye the leathern

scrip, loaded with the holy dust of Calvary, or the relic of virtue to guard from danger or trouble. Nor did the minstrel, abounding in legendary information, the repositary and the embellisher of numberless wild traditions, sing the triumphs of war and the rewards of faithful love, as he wandered from castle to castle, ever welcomed by the smiling glance of its lady-mistress—and perchance, as he was chanting the perils of absent lover in some Provençal tale, and the high-born damsel sat watching its changes and incidents in weeping sympathy, the disguise would fly off, and the minstrel would display the very features of the warrior-youth treasured in her heart. All these were now gone, and the poet and the romancer found themselves tied down to the soberness of truth, or if they yet dared to wander into the fields of fiction, hoping only for a temporary illusion. Criticism nicely weighed to condemn every deviation from probability, and reason and philosophy raised their trophies over the prostrate fancy.

But though we may be permitted thus playfully to lament the increase of light as unfavourable to poetry, and regret the lost

traditions and general credulity which allowed so fine a field for daring imaginations and fantastical descriptions, let us not be ungratefully regardless of the manifold advantages which the revival of Classic Letters has conferred on literature and lettered men. And surely we may be excused in our enthusiasm, when we observe the revolution that took place in the system of education, and among the true scholars of Europe. The verbal frivolousness of the schools disappeared from the universities—the monkish historians and the folios of quibbling philosophy yielded to the beautiful, tasteful, and delightful volumes of Grecian and Roman learning. No more was the young ambition sent to dull its fancies in miserable subtleties, but it was taught to raise its glance, and direct its aspirations, to those at once models and instruments of perfection. The men of letters did not, as before, form a class strongly marked from the rest of the world, but Classic studies came forth into every rank of polished life; they scorned the poor limits of monasteries and colleges, and entered into the elegant amusements, the pleasures of the finished

gentleman. It was soon seen that refinement could not be perfect unless adorned with the grace of letters; and the noble inheritant of immense estates found his riches powerless unless surmounted and distinguished by a cultivated taste. He no longer preferred to waste his hours in idleness, or destroy by riotous courses the insipidity of his existence, but he learnt to look for occupation, joy, and variety, in studies worthy of him. The arts of peace, too, now predominated to remove the proud attachment hitherto shown to war—the ferocity of feudal dissensions was softened away by companionship in literary pursuits, or shamed by the empire now extending of intellect. The exercises of the body gave place to those of the mind; pride of birth was humbled by the pride of genius, and gentle courtesy prevailed over the brutality of a Scythian ancestry. The spreading love of literature introduced more liberal feelings towards other nations—the scholars of climes once hostile considered themselves as brothers in a common cause, and maintained with each other friendly intercourse and correspondence—Classic history

brought the hope of greater freedom, and a better acquaintance with popular rights as distinguished from the overweening prerogatives of sovereigns. The arts of liberty were likewise courted; and as the author in his full admiration of ancient volumes, strove to transfuse their beauties into his own language, so the generous scholar thirsted to raise his country to a level with the great and free nations he read of, by embellishing it with the first ornaments of wealth—literature, and the fine arts. Education became general in the different orders of society, and to be eminent it was essential to be instructed.

Classic Letters have a farther claim to our gratitude, as the parents of that literary ardour—that ambition for literary distinction—which they have so often infused into the worthy breast. That they have been sometimes misdirected to building up for the laborious student a reputation for mere learning, undigested and without judgment, cannot be denied; but to the higher class of intellects they have inspired that tasteful love of study, which continually increases, and looks with confidence for hours of

delight to a well-stored library. I speak not here of that unfruitful taste for study, the pleasure of learning for learning's sake, the pura voluptas literarum, which is contented with being gratified, and dies with the scholar without benefitting others. No —it is a higher object which chains him to his closet—at these ancient fountains he but stops to refresh, as it were, his mind for higher advances in knowledge—and invigorated he proceeds to rival his models if he cannot surpass them—he seeks to cull out for himself amid the immortal laurels which are blooming around him some amaranthine garland to cover his own brow—to cause to flourish in his own tongue something which may perpetuate his name, and make him a *Classic* for posterity. With these aims you will see the scholar, spurning the ambitions and temptations of life, toil on in the unceasing pursuit; ransacking every corner of literature, spreading his researches to every part of antiquity, and never going in vain—but drawing here a fine idea, here a powerful stimulus, gathering here some of the poetical inspirings, which rise like the dew, healthful exhalations from the Classic

soil, to quicken and enrich his mind—then leaving the limits of ancient thoughts, and never resting till beauties as striking, inventions as new, and reflections, clothed in the eloquence just enthusiasm never fails to give, as profound as theirs, stand fixed in his own pages, to be in future times the beginnings to others of superior discoveries. This is the ardour Classical Letters have awakened and can awaken—and hence the thirst for increase in knowledge their admirers have acquired. Among them are to be sought those giants in learning, who have given to study, not the spare hours from other pursuits, but who have made it the sole and undivided business of their lives, sacrificing to it health, comfort, and fortune. And indeed what can create a greater desire of literary fame, than to see it thus continued ages and ages after the authors themselves have sunk into the tomb? As the scholar is absorbed in such meditations, hope, hope raises herself before him, pointing to unnumbered years as the noble meed of a life of letters.

This contemplation of the influence of the Classics upon literature is most pleasing to

the student, and gives them a stronger title to his admiration and love. For as he is reading them, not the events only they describe are acted once again before him—not the great passions which swayed the republics of antiquity renew themselves in his breast—but more—the darkness of the middle ages—the insecurity of property—the monopoly of learning—the oppression extending through every rank—arise in all their gloom to his view, and then these benefactors are seen issuing from the grave like spirits of beneficence, to change the whole character of the world, and open to mankind, to the lowest as to the highest, glorious hopes. The history of the mutilated manuscripts, defiled with dust, dragged from the prison-houses they had so unworthily been buried in, asks in him a deeper interest than the splendid but valueless records of pomps and tournaments, and all the exaggerated benefits of so much vaunted chivalry; he would rather attend the persevering scholar in his rovings to disinter some unknown Latin or Grecian author, than the mailed monarch to the field of blood. And ever, as he is dwelling on some of the spirited fancies of the Classic

bard, a hundred rival and delightful passages in Spenser, in Tasso, in Milton, Ariosto, Pope, and so many other poets who have followed their ancient predecessors, crowd into his memory—and though borrowed, yet are adapted with so much skill to modern times, and have received so many delicate additional graces, that the imitation gives him a higher joy even than the original. He feels that he is not alone in his devotion to Classical studies—but was there ever a mighty genius who has thrown a stronger light upon the world, who has given out diviner beams of knowledge to improve or gratify it; to those self-same pages has he had recourse—the scholar, proudly claiming kindred with him, may say, "I, too, have a portion of your taste, a relish keen as your own for antique beauties, and in one part at least of your character I can equal you."

Among the subjects of this Lecture, which the length of the preceding remarks prevents me from touching upon, the most important, as well as the most interesting, is the effect of the Revival of Classical Learning upon Religion, in spiritualizing it, in freeing it from abuses, and becoming the main-spring of the Reformation. It must